

Some Account of the Senbyú Pagoda at Mengún, near the Burmese Capital, in a Memorandum

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1. The Pagoda was built in the reign of king *Bodo Piyah*,¹ in the Burmese year 1178 (A.D. 1816), by his grandson, NOUNGDAU GYEE, now known as *Bagyeedau Piyah*,² which specifies his relationship as paternal uncle to the present reigning king.

2. It is situated at *Mengoon*, on the west bank of the Irrawaddy, a couple of hundred yards only from the huge brick ruin which is known as the *Mengoon* pagoda.

3. *Mengoon* was a place of comparatively little note, until raised into importance by king *Bodo Piyah*, who made it his favourite retreat, and conceived and founded the monster pagoda which has given or taken its name from the place of its creation.³

4. King *Bodo*'s partiality for the place, or his extensive building propensity seems to have been necessarily imitated by those about him, so that it soon became a conventional undertaking on the part of members of his family (and of his government too) to add to the importance and sanctity of the fashionable retreat, by embellishing it with shrines, pagodas, and other good works then in favour with the king.

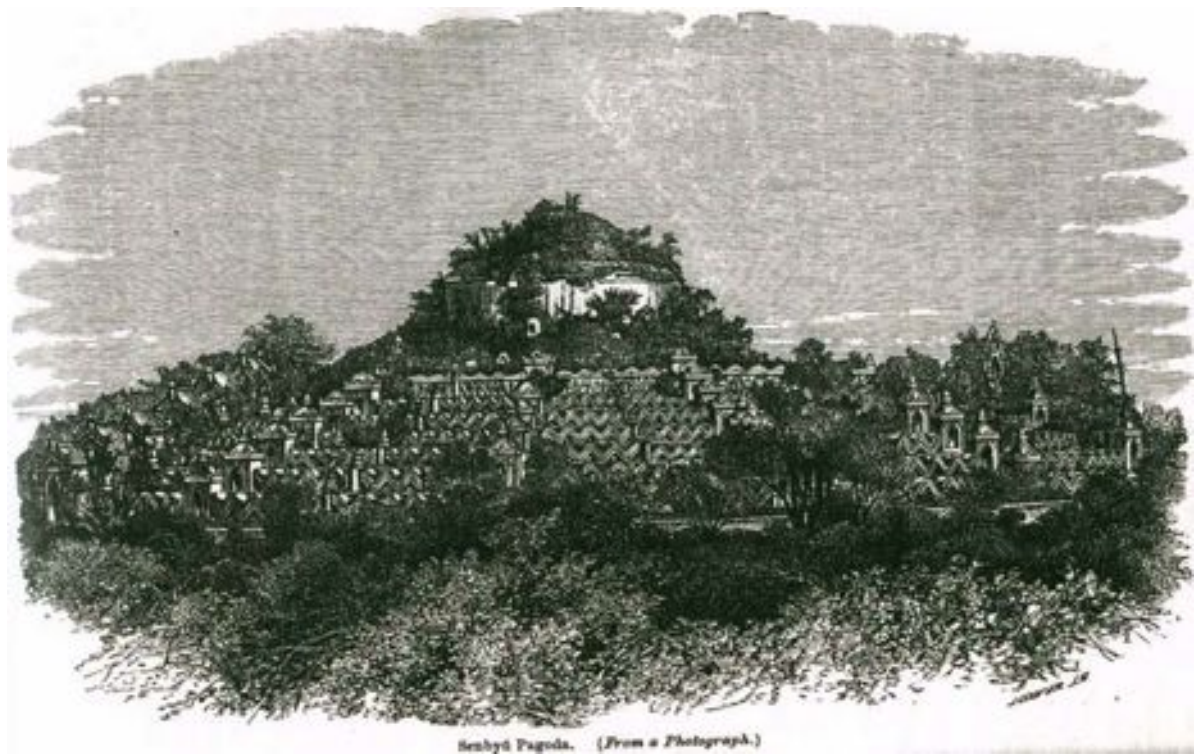
5. The Senbyoo pagoda thus rose into existence. It derives its name from *Bagyeedau*'s chief queen, who was a grand-daughter of king *Bodo*, and believed further, under the transmigration principle, to have been a revivification in the flesh of *Bodo*'s mother; consequently she was privileged to assume *Bodo*'s majestic title of "*Senbyoo Shen*," or Lord of White Elephants.

6. It is singular enough that this pagoda (*Senbyoo*) should have been built in a form which at once distinguishes it from the ordinary class of similar structures throughout Burmah. But though this singularity is somewhat unaccountable, the structural design of the pagoda is evident enough; and its connection therefore, in an architectural point of view, with similar Buddhistical remains in Java and elsewhere, can be so far satisfactorily traced.

¹ *Bhodau Phra* is the title given to the king who reigned from 1781 to 1819, called by Symes, who visited his court, *Minderawji Praw* (Mantarágyí).—Henry Yule.

² *Phagyi-Dau* is the title of the king who reigned 1819-1837, and in whose time our first Burmese war took place. —Henry Yule.

³ Mengún is on the west bank of the Irrawadi, about six or seven miles from Mandalé, the present capital. An account of the great pagoda there will be found in the Narrative of Major Phayre's Mission, p. 168.—Henry Yule.



6. The pagoda is intended to be a complete symbolical representation or model of Mount Meru, known to Burmans as "*Myenmho DOUNG*."

7. It is as well perhaps that I should enter briefly into a description of this cosmical mountain (that is to say, a Burmese description) by way of illustrating, in some slight degree, the woodcut which is annexed, and of explaining beyond question, that the pagoda, about which we are interested is, in reality, a simple representation of the mountain to be described.

8. Burmese fragmentary accounts, collected from a variety of sources, would have us believe in the first place, in reference to this famous *Myenmho DOUNG*, that the earth we inhabit, is composed of four continents, which lie at the extreme base of the mountain, in exact correspondence with the four cardinal points of the compass. Insurmountable harriers, and interminable seas separate these continents from direct contact with *Myenmho DOUNG*, but these seas and barriers are to some extent limited at the base of the mount by the monster fish "*Ananda*," which surrounds the hill on all sides with its body, and defines a complete circle by taking its own tail in its mouth.⁴ This fabulous monster fish, which is regarded as the outer guard, barrier, or defence to the mountain itself, is represented at the *Senbyō* pagoda by a large outer circular wall, eight feet in height, four in thickness, and 750 yards in length or circumference.

The five (or rather six) concentric terraces, which are seen in the photograph to rise one above and inside the other, are representations of the five regions, continents, or countries, which surround the hill in concentric gradations from its base upwards.

⁴ Is not this the Midgard Serpent Jörmundgand of the Edda, "that holding his tail in his mouth encircles the whole earth." (Translation of the Prose Edda, 410.) —John Ferrgusson.

The continents are called in Burmese—with reference I imagine only to the manner in which they are represented in drawings or models—“*Aleyne gna Sen*,” or the five concentric gradations.

Each continent takes its name from the guard stationed in it for its defence, or rather for the defence of the mountain itself, against the attacks of the fallen angel or Nat “*Athooya*.”

Ascending from the base the

1st Continent is called *Năgāh*.

2nd. „ „ *Kālōn*, sea-dragon or fabulous bird.

3rd. „ „ *Gōmbān* “*Beloo*,” or man devouring monster of the Gomban tribe.

4th „ „ *Yěthā* “*Beloo*,” of the Yatha tribe.

5th „ „ *Gundăpāh*,⁵ from the Nat, or spirit, or fairy of that name.

The fifth, or uppermost terrace, is surmounted by the *Sōōlāmăñēē*⁶ pagoda, which in turn has continents or terraces stretching out from its base, above which rise the several *Paradises*, in which reside spiritual beings of the Nat, angel, or fairy tribe.

9. This description of the hill and its belongings might be enlarged on, and lengthened out into almost unlimited detail, but with very little advantage as regards the architecture of the *Senbyoo* Pagoda, with which we are at present principally concerned.

10. The only discrepancy I find in connecting the pagoda with the description given above, is that it represents *six* instead of *five* concentric terraces.

The sixth terrace, though as evident as daylight, is ignored or accounted as nought, by those on the spot, who affirm that the bottom or basement terrace (though it is a terrace as much as any of the rest, and ascended by a flight of steps, similar in all respects to those attached to the other terraces) does not count, and is no real terrace at all. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that the extra terrace was tacked on by mistake, but I can readily believe in the aptitude and inclination of the Burmese artist or architect to disregard the mere trifle (as it would appear to him) of being particular as to correct definition or representation, if by the addition of a mere terrace or two, he could in any way beautify the original design, or make up for loss of height or other structural deficiency.

⁵ These names restored from Burmese alteration are, I imagine, *Asura*, *Nāga*, *Garuda*, *Kumbhānda*, *Yaka*, *Gandharva*.—Henry Yule.

⁶ I find on reference to a Burmese book, that *Soo-la-mă-nee* is the name of a *pagoda* far up in the celestial regions, and worshipped by the *Nats*. I do not know the meaning of the word. From Sladen's note I do not understand whether the name is given to the great central structure of the *Senbyoo* pagoda, which in fact represents Mount Meru, or whether there is a separate building which carries the name of *Soo-la-mă-nee*. The *real* *Soo-la-mă-nee* in heaven is said to be three Yojana high, so in the model at Mengún, it would, or ought to be proportionably small, if compared with the representation of Mount Meru.—Arthur Phayre.

11. I have already said that the outer circular wall of the Senbyoo pagoda (which represents the monster whale Ananda) is about 750 yards in circumference. The first or lower terrace at the base of the pagoda, has by rough measurement, a circumference of 400 yards.

The height and distance of each concentric terrace, above and apart from the other, is uniformly and respectively five feet; and each terrace is ascended on four sides, corresponding with the points of the compass, by flights of steps, leading under elaborately formed porticos of masonry, and stuccoed decorations.

Each terrace too is girt or supported by a wavy serpentine parapet, which I understand to represent the mountain barriers which separate the several continents of *Myenmho-Doung*.

The wavy pattern idea in mortar bears a strong and rather ingenious resemblance to various paintings I have seen, by Burmese artists, who aspire to depict hills and mountain scenery.

The parapets are flanked, or rather connected at regular distances, by arched pillars, the archway of each containing a niche, or open space, in which the guardian monster deity, or Bělōo, sits and defies all enemies.

If the photograph which I send is looked into, it will be seen that a gentleman who was with me at the time the picture was taken, has kindly contributed his mite to science by perching himself upon the top of one of the masonry mountains which form the parapet of the terrace. The natural proportions, thus given, will be of more service I hope (by a comparison of parts) in estimating dimensions, than any unprofessional measurement or estimate of my own.

In fact, so clear is it to me that the architectural relationship, as regards design, between this pagoda and other similar structures in Java, or northern India, has been fully established and accounted for, that the necessity for correct measurement, by way of elucidating what has hitherto been supposed doubtful, no longer exists.

The photographs might have been better. They were taken on dry plates (Beer process), under rather unfavourable circumstances. The wind blew so freshly during the time of exposure, that the camera and other apparatus would have disappeared altogether, unless held in position. This too, in one instance, whilst a view was being taken from the top of the whale Ananda's back.

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